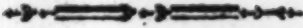


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L E T T E R

OF THE RIGHT REVEREND

BISHOP OF LEON.



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L E T T E R

OF THE RIGHT REVEREND

JOHN FRANCIS DE LA MARCHE,

BISHOP OF LEON,

ADDRESSED TO THE

FRENCH CLERGYMEN

REFUGEES IN ENGLAND.

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH FROM THE ORIGINAL
FRENCH.



L O N D O N :

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GENTLEMEN,

INTIMATELY acquainted with the grateful sense you entertain of the generosity of the English nation, I have lost no time in discharging the important trust you have been pleased to repose in me. As often as I have had access to the honourable gentlemen through whose hands the national bounty has been conveyed to you, I have endeavoured to express the transports of admiration and gratitude which filled your hearts, and which it was your earnest request that I should communicate to them.

I am sensible that my feeble endeavours could give but a faint idea of the feelings of my own heart, or of yours, and your repeated applications convinced me, that it was your desire to offer a more extensive and a more distinguished proof of your gratitude. How happy should I be to have it in my power to

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comply with so reasonable a request? But while the nature and the extent of the obligation surpasses the power of a proper acknowledgment, give me leave, by way of making you some amends, to offer you a return of those sentiments, which I have often had the pleasure of hearing expressed by you.

It is to you I wish to address myself on the subject of a reception which comforts you, of a protection which affords you security, of a beneficence which astonishes you. They have laid you under an obligation which it is not in your power to discharge; but religion may supply the defect. Our God can make that people happy, who have done so much for you. Is not the cause of our exile, and our sufferings his cause? Has he not said to his disciples, that they who receive them, receive him, and that they shall not lose their reward? With what confidence, then, may you hope to draw down his blessings on your benefactors!

We were not incited by the love of earthly riches to oppose the revolutions which have taken place in our country. The sacrifices we were ready to make astonished even those whose cupidity aimed at the possessions of the church. The offers we made
would

would have averted heavy calamities from our fellow subjects. If we pleaded our ancient laws and the oaths we had taken to the King and to the government, we were ready to secure the happiness of the people by a surrender of our honors, our privileges and all our personal interests. Error threatened the profanation of the sanctuary; our fortunes and even our lives could only be saved by apostasy and by perjury. At this moment, Gentlemen, you thought it your duty to display your fortitude and to make a firm stand. At this moment, persecutions, exile and torture found you unshaken in your adherence to the laws and the doctrines of the God whom we serve. His priests, his confessors, his pontiffs have been received in England, have met with protection and support. The glory of this God, and every other motive, impel us to implore his bounty and his power in favour of our distinguished benefactors.

This is likewise my reason for inviting you to unite in prayer, in order that your joint supplications may draw down the blessings of our God on a great and powerful nation, which has held out to us a security, a comfort and a liberty, which our country, more unhappy in its deviation from the line

of truth and rectitude, than inexorable in the rigor of its vengeance, would not suffer us to enjoy at home.

These prayers will be fervent indeed; they will be sincere, if offered with a warmth equal to the benefits received. Our misfortunes have been unexampled in former ages; the generosity of the English nation surpasses all the instances of benevolence recorded in the history of nations.

But if we would form a just estimate of the value of these benefits, we must never lose sight of the unfortunate events which gave occasion to them.

When we beheld our holy religion attacked in its fundamental principles, our altars stripped of their ornaments, our temples polluted, and the patrimony of the church abandoned to a mercenary band of ruffians and thieves, the costly vessels and the Holy of Holies defiled by the most sacrilegious profanation; when we saw, that while delusive decrees were passed to flatter us with an unlimited liberty of religious worship, that of our forefathers alone was excluded from the protection of the law, that the faithful could no longer assist at our august sacrifice, without exposing themselves to the insults, the barbarity
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and the daggers of a lawless rabble; who would have thought that this was but the beginning of our misfortunes! Your fortitude was not damped by these severe trials; you were permitted to breathe, and your zeal and your fidelity added a new lustre to that holy religion which the wicked had doomed to destruction. Their hour was now fast approaching; they had seized the reins of government, and may practise the most inhuman cruelty with impunity. Their victims were apprehended without resistance; our brethren are crowded into dungeons, the temples of the Lord are converted into capacious prisons to confine his priests, and their general massacre fills the world with indignation and horror.

Happy, thrice happy, they who fell on that occasion! They offered up their blood for their executioners; and, translated into the happy regions of eternal bliss, they now implore the mercy of their Creator on their unhappy country.

Heaven reserved you for other trials; the fated fury of the executioners seemed to drop the sword, and the ruling powers of the day thought they granted you a favor by banishing you from your native soil.

I will

I will not attempt to describe to you our anxious fears for you at this moment. We had not been witnesses of the ferocious assaults, the sanguinary proscriptions, which have crowned you with immortal honour, we had been obliged to exile ourselves from a land from which you was now to be banished, and we had lost the remembrance of our own danger in our solicitude for your welfare. We beheld you driven from your peaceable habitations, exposed to all the hardships of poverty and distress; and we can assure you, in the presence of God, that our own sufferings no longer held a place in our mind. Your cruel situation employed all our attention. We owed to the people of England a return of sensibility and gratitude for their hospitable reception, and a generous offer of service. But we were still to learn the extent of a liberality of which we felt the happy effects. May the God of mercies shower down his chosen blessings on a people who seem chosen by heaven to vindicate the violated laws of nature and humanity! In the days of French power and glory, England often disputed the field of battle, and her efforts were often crowned with success, in asserting her right to the dominion of both seas. But she offers to

us a more glorious spectacle, a triumph of a higher nature. She has opened her ports to you, she considers you not as strangers; she sees you are unhappy, and she embraces you as brethren and friends. The English are not startled at your numbers; they think the best use they can make of their great opulence is to afford succour to a greater number of persons in distress.

In the midst of a bloody war between the two nations, England had drawn the eyes of all Europe upon it by a liberal subscription in favour of the French officers and sailors, who by the fate of arms had become her prisoners. She had overcome them in battle, but she now considers them as men whom it was in her power to save, and compels, by the liberality of her treatment, even her prisoners to consider themselves as her citizens and fellow subjects. This was a favourable presage for you, Gentlemen, who were not brought as prisoners of war, but were considered as victims to your religious principles and firmness of your conduct.

No sooner had the publication of the fatal decree pointed out the numerous objects of benevolence, than subscriptions were opened in this land of humanity, where the miserable

table are never left without resource. All the fortunes of this powerful nation seemed now to be put into your possession, or into that of French laymen who shared your misfortunes. The ships which brought you over by thousands to this happy island, might, on their return, inform your persecutors, that while they were swelling the history of atrocious crimes, England seemed intent on filling up the page of disinterested humanity; that while their committees loosed the ties of society, associations were formed here to enforce the dictates of natural justice, and the common rights of mankind.

Yes, Gentlemen, God seems to have appointed you to justify, by your example, the infallible truth of his divine oracles. He says to you by the mouth of your benefactors, what he formerly said to his apostles; *Have you wanted any thing, when I sent you without a staff and without shoes into the midst of nations**. By them he has said to you; *Be not solicitous about the hand that is to cloath or to nourish you†*. Can any one of you complain of a breach of his promise? When weakened by fatigue,

* Luke, c. 22. v. 35.

† Matth. c. 6. v. 25.

when confined to the bed of sickness, what care, what attention has been shewn you by professional men, equally skilful in the art of healing, and disinterested in its practice, men who found the highest gratification of all their wishes in your returning health! But above all can you desire a more distinguished mark of the tenderness of his divine providence than is afforded by the respectable Committee, wholly employed in discovering and relieving your wants!

Blessed then, and eternally be glorified that God who, in the midst of our distress, has been pleased to point out to us a nation, which he has chosen to be the instrument of his bounty. For, Gentlemen, let me ask you, who of you all, on quitting a country deeply marked with human blood, and on landing on this hospitable shore, did not find men ready to give him a cordial reception, to wipe away his tears, or to mingle their own with his? Who of you did not meet with a thousand instances of unaffected compassion and humanity?

If our memory could recal the many proofs of benevolence of which we were the objects, what an affecting picture would it present! In the sea-ports, in cities, in villages, in the isles, and the capital, what an eagerness to prevent or to relieve our wants! Citizens of eve-

ry rank pressing forward to welcome a colony of unfortunate exiles with a brotherly affection, more happy in the offer of their services than you could feel obliged by receiving them. Anxious to conceal the hand that administered to your wants, and hurt only by the reserve which hid them. These attentions, this liberality were not confined to any particular description of men, but common to the whole nation, and to every class that composes it, to the corporations, to its houses in town, to its chapters, its universities, and its colleges, to the palaces of the rich, and the humble cottages of the poor*.

What

† A thousand little anecdotes might be adduced to prove, that a great degree of sensibility enters into the general character of the people of England, and is found among the lower ranks of society in that country. I beg leave to mention the following facts.

Some French priests going to market, among other things, had occasion to purchase some articles of provision from a woman who kept a green stall. She would not sell, but she gave them several times what they wanted. Concerned to find her obstinate in refusing their money, and fearful of abusing her good nature, the priests addressed themselves to other venders of the same commodity. The good woman is miserable, and flies to them to complain of their unwillingness to let her oblige them.

Others

What a glorious character is here exhibited by men who set no bounds to their beneficence! What a motive of comfort and gratitude to us who feel its effects! Let us never blush to profess these sentiments towards men who have so well deserved them.

Others went to bargain for some fish, but finding it too dear for their pockets, were retiring. The fishwoman soon followed, and, overtaking them, obliged them to accept what they were unable to purchase.

Others again enquiring their way in the streets of London, were soon surrounded by a number of low women. Such an assembly did not fail to alarm them. The good women soon perceived it, and endeavoured to encourage them by an offer of what little money they had about them, which drew tears of gratitude from their eyes.

The bishop of Leon was walking in the streets with his Grand Vicar, when the latter felt something press against him. On looking back he found it was a milkman who had squeezed a piece of money into his hands, and was hastening away that he might not be known.

In the list of subscribers we find a donation of 26 guineas by a person signing *Misericordia*. The same person has contributed other sums, but has always concealed his name. All that we have been able to collect concerning him is, that he has not the appearance of a man in easy circumstances. However he has pledged himself to advance more money when it shall be wanted.

Among all the proofs of national liberality, we must not forget the pocket-money of the school-boys presented to the Committee.

The apostle of the Gentiles, at the sight of the alms collected for the faithful of Philippi and of Corinth, cried out in a transport of gratitude: "May the wishes of these generous benefactors be accomplished by that God whom I have preached to you. May he bestow on them the riches of his glory in our Lord Jesus Christ. My heart is penetrated with gladness at the thought of these men, who have provided for our wants. I acknowledge the obligation they have conferred on me by their care of you. Do justice to these valuable men. Let us pray for them*." If such were the sentiments of the holy apostle towards men who had conferred some favours on his brethren, what must ours be towards a nation contributing so largely to relieve the wants, not only of a numerous colony of ecclesiastics driven from their country for professing the religion of Jesus Christ, but also an infinite number of all orders of men, whom the revolution of our country has driven to these coasts.

If from the different parts of the British empire, we turn our eyes towards the throne, we there find a prince as distinguished by his

* Philip. c. 7. v. 18. 1 Cor. c. 16. v. 17.

munificence towards us, as he has ever been by the love of his people. Under his government the ports are open to us, we are admitted into his dominions, and we enjoy the protection of the laws. This beneficent King has granted one of his royal palaces for the reception of our brethren. His benevolent heart has suggested to him, that the palaces of kings acquire an additional value by affording shelter to the wretched and unhappy.

In conjunction with the King, the British government, equally generous and provident, is deliberating on means to perpetuate its benefaction, by a grant that may compensate for the loss of our possessions in France. This country seems to have extended its conquests over both hemispheres, only to provide for us in the old and the new world. The patrimony of the church and our private property have been forcibly torn from us. England proposes to us a settlement in one of its colonies, among men who profess the same religion, and speak the same language with ourselves, and may not improperly be considered as our countrymen. Their lands will be allotted us, and the implements of husbandry supplied. Agents appointed by government are already crossing

crossing the Atlantic to make suitable dispositions to carry into execution this benevolent design.

But to return to the throne, we have the heart-felt satisfaction to behold a virtuous queen surrounded by a numerous and illustrious family, challenging gratitude by her protection, and our respect by her rank and her virtues.

Let us add our gratitude to the love and attachment of the English nation for their sovereigns, since like them we have the happiness to live under their government.

Let our holy religion be daily more dear to us, as it teaches us to repay benefits by our virtues. Let the edification of our lives, strictly conformable to the dictates of christianity, let our patience, our resignation and sincere devotion, let our conversation, our manners, and every thing about us be worthy the priesthood, and the God whom we have had the happiness to confess. Unpardonable would be the scandal given to benefactors.

More faithful than ever in our duty towards God, let us convince this generous nation, that we think ourselves strictly bound to respect and to observe its laws; that a constitution

tution to which England owes a long series of prosperity, is entitled to our fidelity and submission.

You know, Gentlemen, and it is fitting that the people of England should learn from your conduct, that our religion teaches us, that wherever we are born or settled, it is our duty to observe the laws, and to respect the constitution established for the public good.

It is true, laws have been enacted in this country, which owed their existence to the misfortunes of the times, and over which your zeal would not have failed to weep; but this temporary disadvantage affords a fresh proof of the excellence of a constitution, which can correct its blemishes without those violent commotions which disgrace and overturn other governments. Let us admire the allwise ways of divine providence, which, to prepare you an asylum in this island, disposed the British legislature to adopt a system of toleration very different from that which prevails in our unhappy country, a toleration which on your arrival opened chapels for the public practice of religious worship, and altars prepared to receive our devotion, and the victim we are permitted to present to the eternal Father in
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thanksgiving for his favours, while we call down his mercies on those through whose hands we receive them.

Let us then take advantage of this liberty, let us hasten to these altars, these sanctuaries, let us pour forth the effusions of our gratitude, let us join in prayer with the pious natives who edify us by their fervour and the constancy of their faith, let us conjure our God to bestow his blessings on the nation at large, according to the measure of our obligations; let us beseech him to turn away the fatal principles which are inconsistent with the tranquillity of government; and that he would send his guardian angels to secure the throne of its kings; let us beg of him that he will be graciously pleased to preside over that august senate, the representatives of the people, the interpreters of its wishes and its wants, the defenders of its rights, the oracle of its duties. In those important deliberations, where the interests of nations are discussed, the weighty concerns of peace, war, commerce, finance, and every thing which concerns the public welfare, is debated with wisdom and eloquence, let us intreat our God to direct their councils in framing laws to be sanctioned by
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the king, and in adopting measures, that may bring prosperity to the kingdom.

May union ever prevail among the different parts which compose the British empire, and continually give additional strength and energy to its power and greatness. May England be a stranger to civil discord and anarchy, which must be fatal to the commerce, the property and liberty of her subjects.

May heaven, attentive to our prayers, grant peace and plenty to a country, where we are so hospitably entertained. May every revolving year give an increase to the harvest of a people so ready to share it with the unfortunate. May the Ruler of the winds and seas guide their vessels, and enrich them with the treasures of the east and the west. May England exhibit to all other nations the picture of perfect happiness, as she has held up to them the model of christian benevolence.

This, Gentlemen, is a feeble expression of our gratitude to a fostering nation; the sentiments that inspire it are deeply engraved on our hearts in their whole extent. They will one day be recorded in our annals, and the church, finding the name of a nation of benefactors joined to the history of our mis-

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fortunes,

fortunes, will think it a duty to transmit our prayers and our gratitude to the latest posterity.

Alas! Gentlemen, why do not these sentiments, so natural and so congenial to our feelings, occupy our whole attention? Why are they continually interrupted by the melancholy remembrance of the fatal disorders of our country, and the dangers which threaten the life of our unfortunate monarch? Why must the tears of gratitude be mixed with those of grief and desolation over our unfortunate countrymen? England has repaired the evils brought on us by our persecutors, and we pardon them. But neither the asylum we enjoy, nor the cruelty of those decrees which have forced us to seek it, can make us forget that we have left behind us a number of faithful children, a fold of which we were the shepherds, the fathers and the friends. We are so still; we feel we are from the painful emotions of grief and concern for their misfortunes. Let them then be the joint object of our prayers, let us offer them for the faithful, who lament our absence, and sigh after the spiritual comfort of which our exile deprives them. Let us offer them for our enemies,
and

and may they be accepted as the means of salvation to those who are bent only on our ruin. But above all let them be offered for our captive king deserving of a better fate. Let us often have in our mouths, and always in our hearts, that prayer of the church, O God, save the King: May it prevail on heaven to put an end to the sufferings of a prince which afflict us.

Be not surprised, O generous nation, that we mix our prayers for our King with those we offer for your Sovereign and his people. You, who have done so much to relieve our wants, would you pardon us if we forgot those of our own country. If we are ever suffered to return to it, it will be our first duty to express our grateful sense of the many obligations they have heaped on us, and the many titles they have acquired to our admiration, to our respect and esteem.

Whatever may be the event of the revolutions in France, we shall ever carry these sentiments about us, we shall every where proclaim our grateful remembrance of the munificence of a nation which has done so much to serve us.

To

To conclude, Gentlemen, intrusted with the publication of your sentiments, I am sensible that I have not done justice to your feelings. But I hope, that my endeavours to discharge a duty which lies so near your hearts and my own, will meet with your approbation.

London,

Dec. 30, 1792.

✝ JOHN FRANCIS, Bishop of LEON.



